

VEHICLE SHOWS STUDENTS HOW TO GO GREEN

Some UL Lafayette students are tinkering with an SUV to learn how solar power can be harnessed as a practical energy source.

It's a solar utility vehicle donated by BP, a global oil, gas and chemicals company. Glenn DaGian, a 1972 graduate of USL, (now known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette), presented it to the university in February. He's director of Government Affairs for BP in Texas.

The SUV is equipped with two electric motors totaling 30 horsepower and more than 170 pound-feet of torque, which makes it one of the most powerful all-terrain vehicles available. BP's 185-watt solar panel, which augments the vehicle's battery system and gives the SUV more range, is mounted on top. The four-wheel drive vehicle is capable of seating four people, can carry up to 880 pounds and can maintain a speed of 20 miles per hour. It has a 30-mile range.

"Very few schools can touch this type of technology," said Dr. Mark Zappi, dean of the College of Engineering. "Students will be able to study it and drive it. The benefits will go on for many years."

DaGian, a political science graduate, said the vehicle's



A Bad Boy Buggies representative demonstrated the solar utility vehicle's power by using its reverse gear to climb the outdoor stairs of Martin Hall.

silent operation is an advantage. "The solar utility vehicle is primarily useful for wildlife parks, areas where noise or pollution is a problem," he said.

Current uses for the solar buggy include wildlife areas, such as Yellowstone National Park and the Sandy Point State National Park in Maryland. DaGian said the solar panel could be adapted to applications involving boats.

DaGian and BP are also working on a charging station that uses solar panels to recharge the SUV when its not in use, eliminating the need to have an electrical source to charge the buggy.

DaGian developed the solar panel and attached it to the vehicle, which was manufactured by Bad Boy Buggies in Natchez, Miss. The SUV given to UL Lafayette was the 14th developed by DeGian, BP and Bad Boy Buggies. ■



Scott Chappuis checks out a proposed design.

people. For example, we're looking at a partnership with Catholic University of America, which is in Washington, D.C., because it would be a great help for the logistics of the competition up there. Maybe it could help us collaborate on part of the project," Gjertson said.

Many state and local leaders have expressed interest in the BeauSoleil Home, he continued. The BeauSoleil Team is working with them to see how they can help.

In addition to benefiting UL Lafayette students, the BeauSoleil Home will draw national and international attention to the university.


In 2007, about 120,000 people toured homes in the "solar village" on the National Mall.

But Gjertson said public exposure is also measured by "impressions," which refers to the number of people who read published information about a project or see coverage by broadcast media.

"In 2007, decathlon officials calculated that there were over 600 million impressions, which means that 600 million people were exposed to the project," he said. That number is expected to grow to a billion after documentaries about the decathlon are completed and distributed.

Gordon Brooks is dean of UL Lafayette's College of the Arts, which encompasses the School of Architecture. He said the potential impact of the BeauSoleil House is huge.

"Every now and again, a project comes along that has transformative powers. This is one of them." ■

 beausoleilhome.org